

SPORTS

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Warriors Remain Unbeaten

Wakefield Defends Its District Tourney Crown

by DAVE STEINBACHER
Staff Writer

In their closest game of what so far has been an undefeated season, the Wakefield Warriors held off the Edison Eagles, 65-64 in overtime, Friday night in the championship game of the National District tournament.

Boys Basketball

As a result, Wakefield (23-0) successfully defended their district tourney title, and advanced to the Northern Region tournament this week.

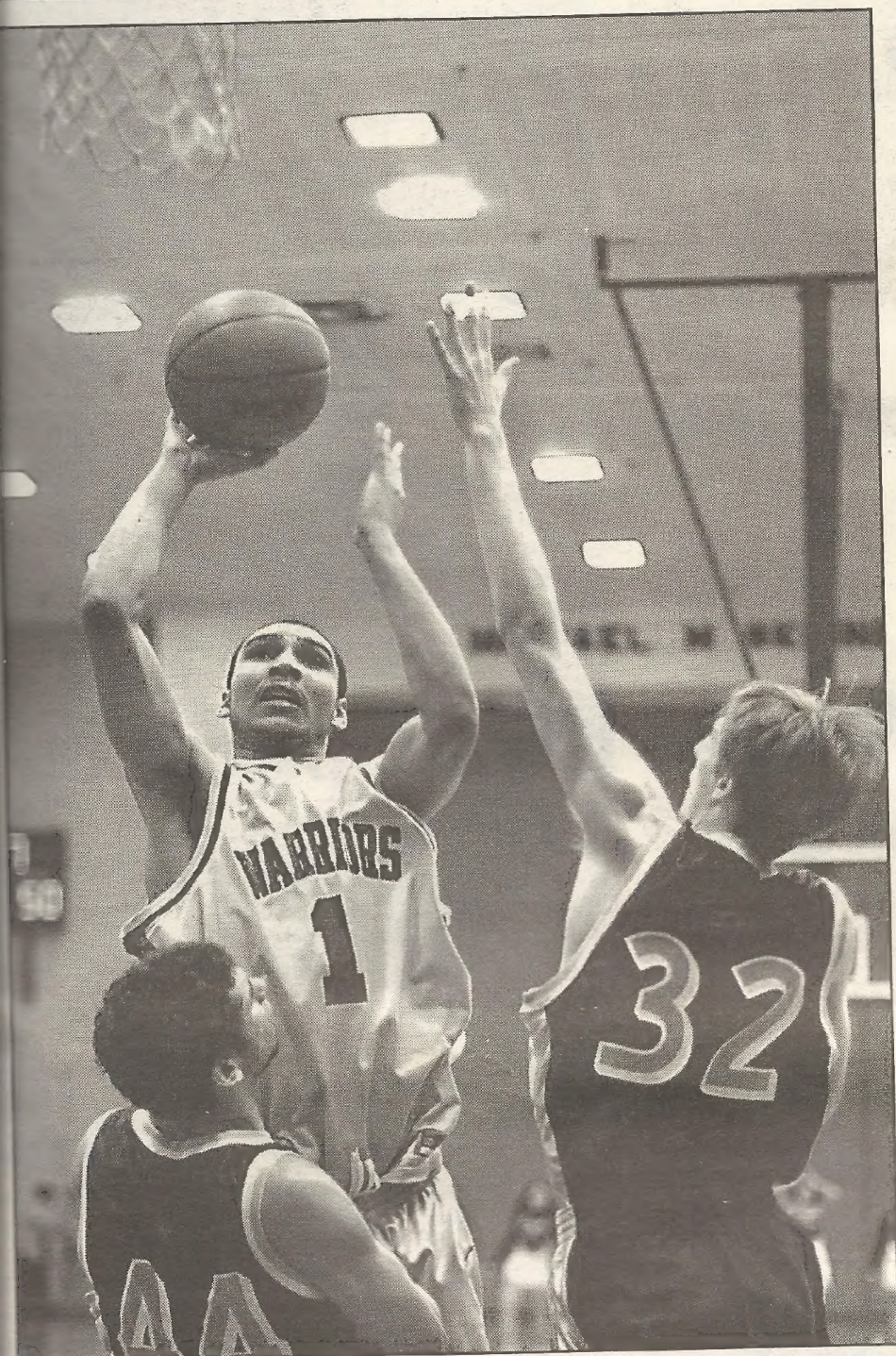
With the score at 56 at the end of regulation, Wakefield outscored Edison, 9-8, in the extra period.

"Nobody panicked going into overtime, we have a senior-laden team," Wakefield coach Tony Bentley said.

Wakefield played the final 1 minute, 23 seconds of regulation and, all of overtime, without leading scorer and senior post Alex Imer, who fouled out.

"We found a way to win without Alex," Bentley said.

Following an Edison free throw in over-



Wakefield's Anthony Allen shoots over Washington-Lee's Chris Bangs, No. 32, and Mike Morris in last week's district tournament semifinal contest.

PHOTO BY MARK YOUNG

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Warriors

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time, senior point guard Kenny James put the Warriors ahead, 58-57, with a smooth bucket off the glass from the left side with 3:09 to play. Senior forward Geoffrey Crawley converted a put-back bucket, and Wakefield led, 60-57. A pair of free throws by senior forward Jarrod Williams upped the lead to 62-57. Then a basket by senior forward Anthony Allen put the Warriors in front, 64-57.

From there, Wakefield missed a number of free throws that allowed Edison to pull close. James eventually made a free throw, which proved to be the winning margin. Both teams also turned the ball over in the final minutes.

"Edison came ready to play," Crawley said. "Our win was due to us playing team ball."

Wakefield has defeated Edison three times this season, but Friday's game was the closest.

"This championship means everything," Wakefield forward Nate Idlet said. "We all thought that we could go this far this season."

Said James: "It was a real magical season. Being undefeated is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

Irmer was chosen the tournament Most Valuable Player.

"This championship is the best feeling in the world," Irmer said. "Hard work, defensive pressure and a little bit of luck is what it took tonight."

Edison coach Ivan Thomas said his team played well.

"I couldn't be prouder of my team," he said. "You couldn't ask for a more competitive game. Wakefield has a great club."



Wakefield's Kenny James, No. 33, shoots over Washington-Lee's Mike Morris in a district tournament semifinal game.

PHOTO BY MARK YOUNG

Bentley realized his Wakefield team would have a tough game in the district final.

"We knew that this was going to be a dog fight," he said. "We really had to find a way to dig down deep. Geoff Crawley has accepted his role in coming off of the bench this season. Why he didn't make the all-tournament team is beyond me."

Irmer and James were Wakefield's players on the all-tourney team. Jeff Leighton and Mike Morris made the team from Washington-Lee.

In the title game, Wakefield led, 14-11, after the first quarter; was ahead, 26-22, at halftime; and was in front, 40-31, after three periods. In the fourth, Edison outscored Wakefield, 25-16.

Crawley had 24 points and 11 rebounds for Wakefield.

"Geoff Crawley had a huge game," Bentley said.

Also for Wakefield, James had

13 points, Irmer 11, Williams six, Allen and Idlet four each, and George Johnson three.

In the semifinals, Wakefield defeated the Washington-Lee Generals, 71-64, and Edison defeated the Yorktown Patriots, 48-41. Irmer had 19 points for Wakefield, James scored 16, and Allen and Johnson had 10 each. Johnson made three three-pointers.

Morris scored 16 for Washington-Lee (8-15) and Leighton scored 13.

In the semifinal loss for Yorktown (11-12), Ted Mayo had 12 points and Brian Veith nine. Yorktown led, 27-21, at halftime.

In first-round action, Washington-Lee defeated Stuart, 73-58, and Yorktown knocked off host Mount Vernon, 61-57. Leighton led Washington-Lee with 17 points against Stuart, Morris had 13, Josh McDaniel 10, and Chris Bangs

nine. Mayo had 17 points and Cullen Hitt and Veith scored 12 each for Yorktown against Mount Vernon.

In region tourney action, Wakefield was scheduled to host Oakton on Monday night, Washington-Lee played at Westfield and Yorktown played at Herndon.

NOTES: Irmer became tied as Wakefield's all-time leading scorer with his point production in the district tournament. He entered this week's region tournament with 1,138 career points . . . Wakefield principal Doris Jackson had a comment about Wakefield's season. "It's been the ride of our lives. Everyone at the school has been behind the players." . . . Wakefield senior Nick Wing, dressed in a green cape outfit, was the designated student super fan and spearheaded the Wakefield sideline enthusiasm.

Idlet Was Missing Link to Wakefield's Success

by DAVE FACINOLI
Staff Writer

When it counted most, a new senior starter was the missing link who produced the miraculous game-winning shot.

Boys Basketball

A reverse layup by Nathaniel Idlet with no time remaining last Tuesday night gave the undefeated Wakefield Warriors (28-0) a 60-58 victory over the Hayfield Secondary School Hawks in the championship game of the Northern Region high school tournament. The speedy and athletic Idlet, whose vertical leap is at the tippy top of most charts, had 14 points in the game, which included three dunks. He

also had eight rebounds, two steals and a blocked shot.

Ironically, Idlet attended Hayfield as an eighth grader. After moving to Germany with his family for his first three years of high school, Idlet returned to Northern Virginia to live with his grandmother in Arlington for his senior year. Since his grandmother lives in Wakefield's school district, he eventually joined the Warriors basketball team.

"I don't think the Hayfield players know I used to go there," Idlet said.

Third-year Wakefield coach Tony Bentley shivers at the thought.

"Can you imagine how good Hayfield would be with him in their lineup?" Bentley said.

With or without Idlet, much was expected from the Warriors this season as Wakefield was gearing up for a potential region championship run. That's because the Warriors already had a talented, experienced and deep team with the likes of players such as senior center Alex Irmer, senior forwards Anthony Allen and Geoffrey Crawley, and senior guards Kenny James, Jarrod Williams, and Jeffrey Hill.

Those players knew one another's games well because some had been playing on the same teams since middle school. Plus, the Warriors were coming off a successful 2003-04 season when they won the National Dis-

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Idlet

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strict tournament.

"We knew we had something special after last season, then we added Nate," Bentley said. "He was the missing piece."

During the offseason, Bentley arranged a tough early-season schedule for the current campaign to better prepare the Warriors for the postseason. That schedule included Wake-

field's holiday tournament that the Warriors won. To do so, they played tough opponents such as H.D. Woodson and C.H. Flowers. Bentley worked the phones to convince some of the teams in the tournament to participate.

"I'd like to thank H.D. Woodson and C.H. Flowers for battle-testing us," Bentley said.

All the while, adding Idlet to the lineup only made the Warriors better. His defensive skills, speed and leaping ability gave Wakefield many more options.

"It was my job to get him to fit in with this team as quickly as possible," Bentley said.

The meshing went so well that it allowed

Bentley to insert Idlet into the starting lineup and move Crawley to the important role of sixth man. Crawley has flourished in that capacity, and often is a huge impact once he enters games. He came off the bench to score 13 points in the region final. In the region semifinals, he had 20 points and yanked nine rebounds in Wakefield's victory.

"Geoffrey doesn't start games, but he's always finishing them," Bentley said. "We are deeper than people think, and our bench has come through all season."

Hill, sophomore guard/forward George Johnson, and junior guard Brian Goodwin are

three other players who come off the bench and regularly contribute for Wakefield. Johnson hit two big jump shots late in the region final to keep Wakefield ahead.

That type of quality depth is one of the reasons Wakefield has enjoyed such a strong season and is way ahead of Bentley's timetable. When he was hired to coach Wakefield, Bentley unveiled a five-year plan to get the program where he wanted.

"We're way ahead of schedule. I don't know what to do now," Bentley said. "I'll have to work harder."

Doing so, may bring more missing links.

Warriors Champs In Region

Wakefield Earns Berth To the State Semifinals

by DAVE FACINOLI

Staff Writer

How vastly deep, balanced, experienced and talented are the Wakefield Warriors? Consider this. The high school team's leading scorer had one of his worst outings in what was the squad's biggest game of the season, but it hardly mattered.

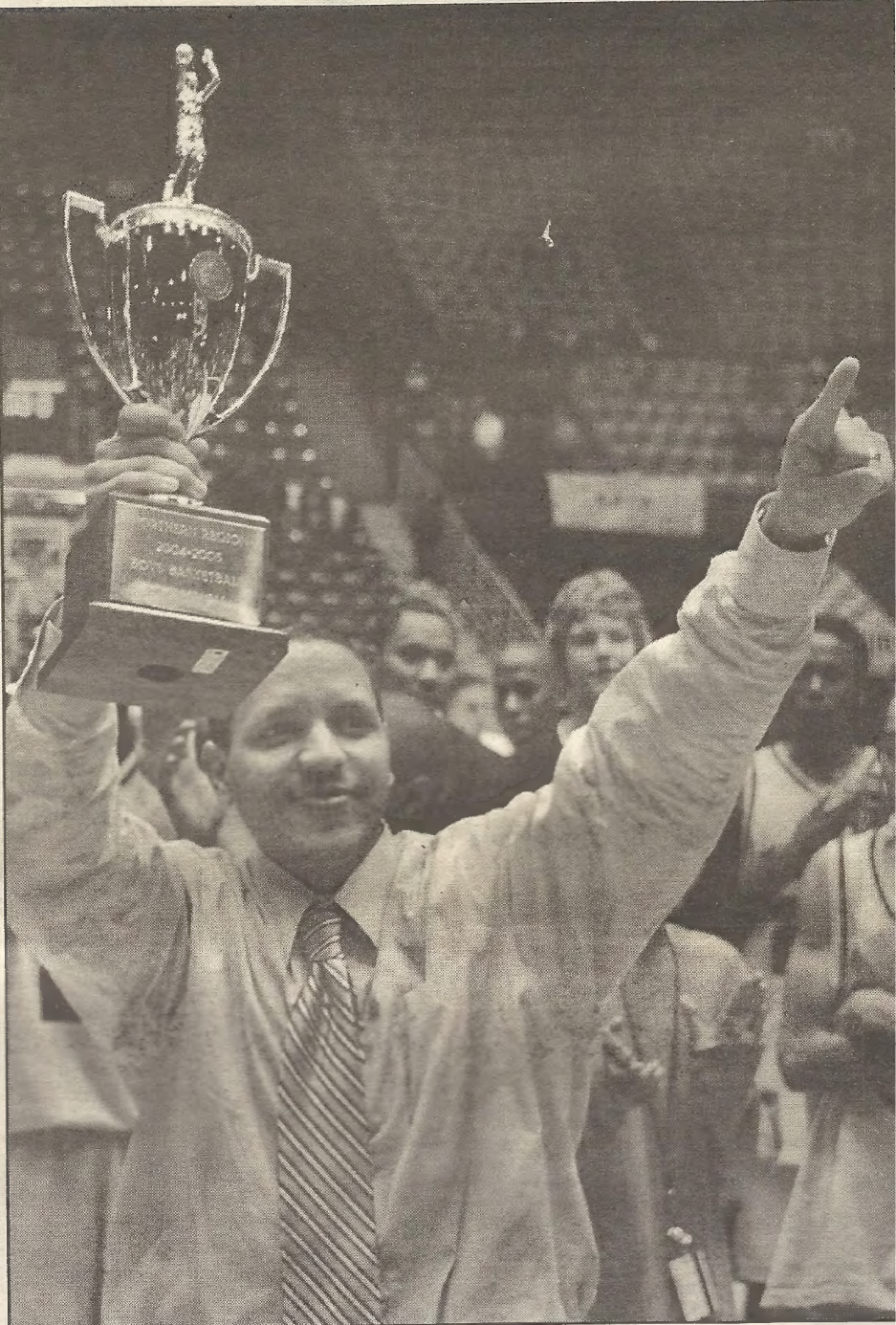
Boys Basketball

Undefeated Wakefield (28-0) won anyhow by edging the defending champion Hayfield Hawks, 60-58, on a dramatic buzzer-beater last Tuesday night at the Patriot Center in the championship game of the Northern Region tournament.

"Alex Irmer plays one of the worst games of his career and we still win," third-year Wakefield coach Tony Bentley said in regard to the senior center and the Warriors' leading scorer and rebounder. "We refuse to lose and we refuse to let one man be our team."

A lot of players contributed to Wakefield's victory over Hayfield, which gave the Warriors their first region crown since 1990 and

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Wakefield High School coach Tony Bentley shows team's large student section the Northern Region championship trophy his Warriors won at the Patriot Center. PHOTO BY MARK YOUNG

Warriors

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their eighth in school history.

One of those players was forward Nathaniel Idlet. The senior grabbed a long offensive rebound along the right baseline off a missed jumper by senior point guard Kenny James, drove under the basket, and made a difficult reverse left-handed layup at the buzzer as the Wakefield fans, players and coaches erupted into celebration.

"I saw the ball come off the glass, I jumped for the rebound on the right side, drove, and reversed it," Idlet said.

Idlet had an outstanding game with 14 points, including three dunks. He also had eight rebounds, a blocked shot, and two steals. James, who had nine points and seven assists and was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player, was confident Idlet was going to convert his miss, despite the difficult angle.

"I was lucky the shot came off so Nate could get the rebound," James said. "I knew he was going to score because he does that same move all the time in practice and always makes the shot."

The winning sequence began with 33 seconds remaining, after a three-point play by Hayfield senior center Michael Freeman (13 points, seven rebounds) tied the game at 58. Wakefield called time out. When play resumed, James had the ball and eventually penetrated in the lane where he wanted to shoot or pass to an open teammate. He took a shot that missed badly. However, his penetration had drawn the defenders toward him. That left Idlet unguarded to run down the rebound.

"They cleared out for me, so the plan was

to drive and penetrate to see what would happen," James said.

The game produced 12 lead changes and eight ties. Wakefield had the biggest lead, of eight points, midway through the third period. Hayfield rallied to build a four-point advantage in the fourth. Wakefield rallied back to take a 56-53 lead with 2:23 to play on back-to-back mid-range jumpers by sophomore backup forward George Johnson (four points, three assists).

A 1-2-1 trapping zone press used by Wakefield late in the game forced a couple of key turnovers when Hayfield was out of timeouts.

"With them having no timeouts, that was a great time to go to that press and let it play out," Bentley said.

Hayfield coach Charlie Thompson was impressed with Wakefield, especially the speed of James and Idlet on the transition.

"We didn't handle their press as well as I thought we could," Thompson said. "Once James gets going, he's tough to control. In some of our matchups they had more speed than us."

Wakefield also defeated Hayfield by a close score at Hayfield during an early regular season game this winter.

In the region final, sixth man Geoffrey Crawley, a senior forward, had 13 points for Wakefield. Also for the Warriors, senior forward Anthony Allen had eight points, as did senior guard Jarrod Williams. Irmer, Wakefield's all-time leading scorer, finished with four points and two rebounds before fouling out in the fourth period. Crawley, Idlet, James and Irmer made the all-tournament team.

"It's an awesome feeling to win the region, I'm so proud of this team," Bentley said. "But now we have another season, and that's the state tournament. We've broken the season down, and we were where we wanted to be at

every stage. Of course you never expect to be undefeated. Our main goal is to win the state, but getting to the Patriot Center was a big deal."

On Saturday night, Wakefield defeated Henrico of Richmond, 63-45, in a first-round game of the Group AAA state tournament at Robinson Secondary School. Wakefield next plays Landstown (24-4) of Virginia Beach in a semifinal Wednesday at the Siegel Center in Richmond. The Group AAA championship game is Saturday at the Siegel Center at 5 p.m. Wakefield won its only state title in 1961.

Against Henrico, Idlet had 15 points; Crawley 12 to go with eight rebounds; Allen and Johnson scored 10 each; Irmer six; and James had four points, four assists and two steals. A 9-0 run to close the first half gave Wakefield a 26-24 lead, and the Warriors didn't trail again.

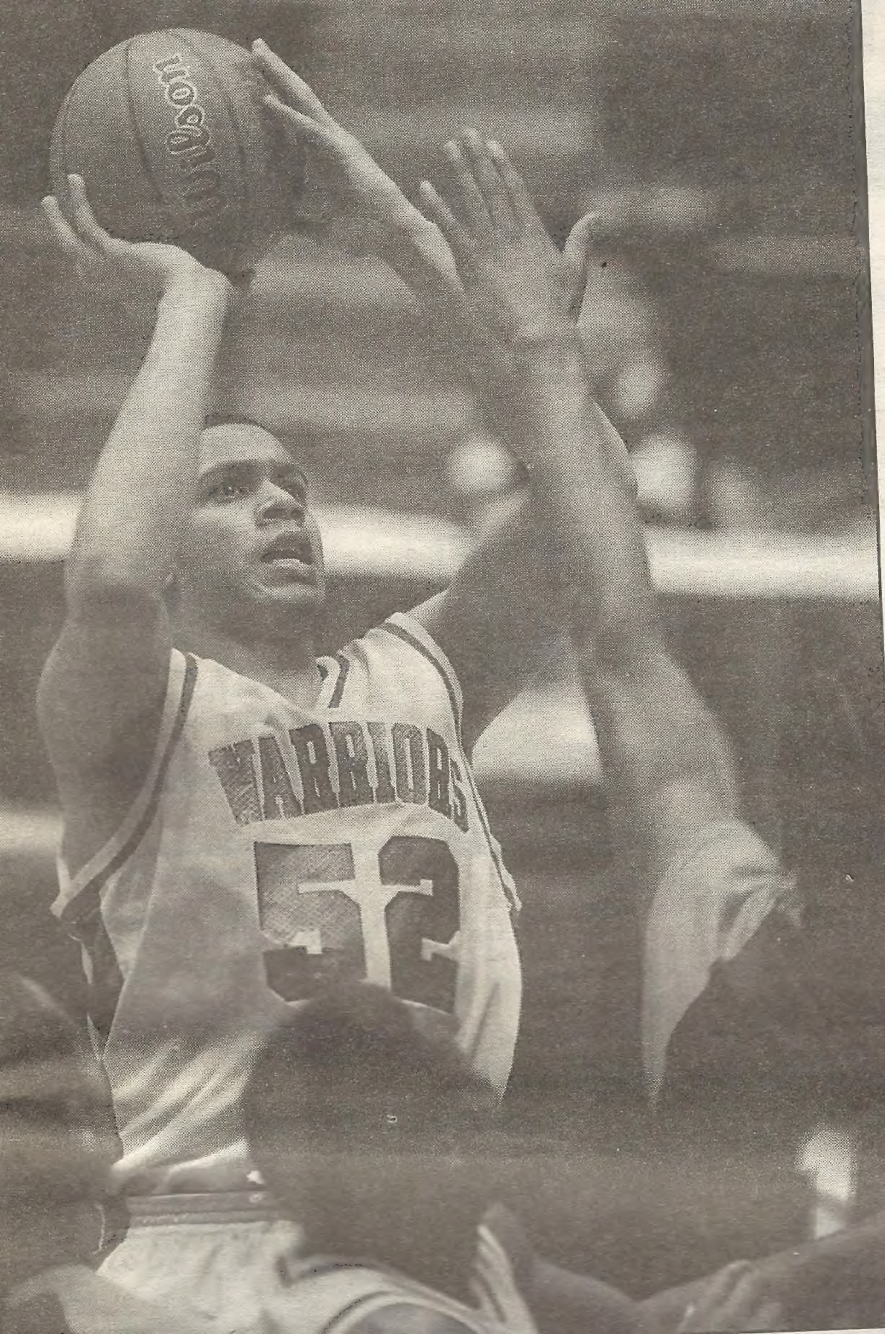
Henrico (22-6) slowed the tempo for much of the game. The strategy worked early on as Henrico built a 24-17 lead late in the first half. At that point, Wakefield's full-court zone press began forcing turnovers.

"They are going to go far," Henrico coach Vance Harmon said. "They're big, strong and talented, they have an outstanding point guard and big men, they have depth, and they can wear you down. I was very impressed by them."

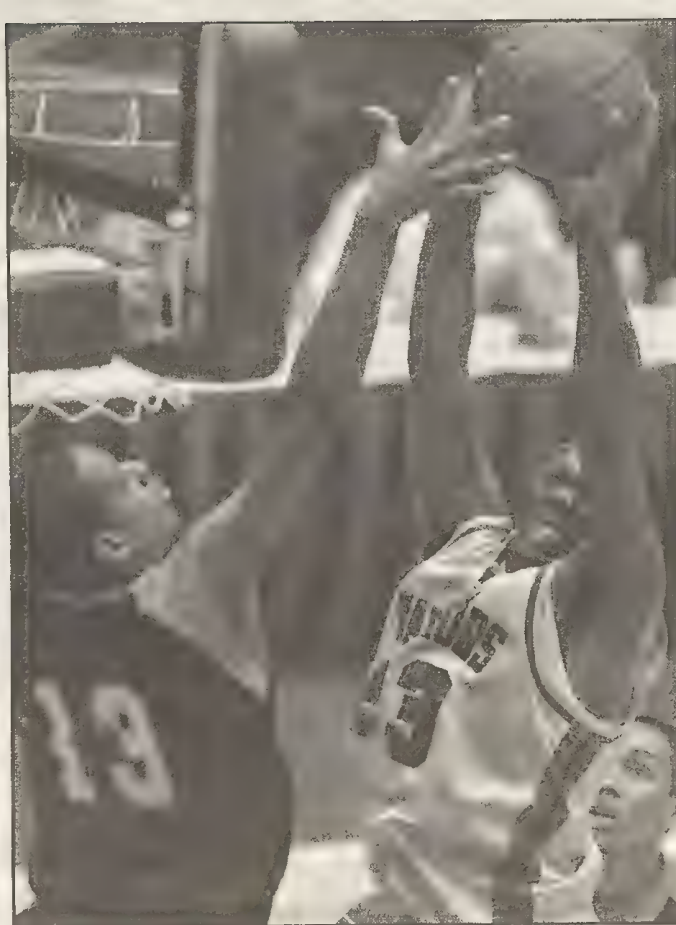
Bentley said his team had its hands full against Henrico.

"They came ready and they were crashing the boards," he said. "They made us have to get going in the second half. Their point guard [Jason Wansley] was very good. We kept putting different people on him."

Wansley had 11 points, six rebounds, seven steals, two blocked shots, and two assists. Henrico outrebounded Wakefield by a 31-25 margin.







The Wakefield Warriors won their first Northern Region boys basketball high school championship since 1990 last Tuesday night at the Patriot Center when they defeated the defending champion Hayfield Hawks in a thrilling finish. A lot happened during and after that contest. Clockwise from top left: Wakefield senior forward Geoffrey Crawley takes a short jump shot in the first half. Following the game, the team gathers with the championship trophy held high. Wakefield senior point guard Kenny James drives to the basket to take an under-hand layup. Senior forward Nathaniel Idlet soars strong to the basket for two points over Hayfield's Mike Davis. Idlet made the winning basket on a reverse left-handed layup at the buzzer. After the game, Wakefield senior center Alex Irmer and head coach Tony Bentley share a hug. This past Saturday night Wakefield won its first-round state tournament game and play Wednesday at 5 p.m. in the semifinals in Richmond.

Photos by Mark Young







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Photos by Mark Young



Jeff Mankie/Examiner

Warriors senior forward Anthony Allen, center, has become Wakefield's motivator after turning his life of trouble into a life of example.

Wakefield's Allen scores on turnaround

Warriors' motivator used basketball to help get life in order

BY BRIAN McNALLY
Examiner Staff Writer

You never know what sets them off. Maybe it was a comment before the game or a sharp elbow to the ribs. But all of the sudden, often early in the first quarter, an opposing player will start a ruckus as Wakefield senior forward Anthony Allen walks away with the slightest smile creasing his face.

It happened with Hayfield senior forward Mike Freeman in the Northern Region championship game. And again in Saturday's Group AAA state quarterfinal when Henrico senior Leland DePriest, a 6-foot-3, 265-pound forward, picked up a quick technical foul after a confrontation with Allen. The flustered DePriest scored just eight points in the Warriors' 63-45 victory.

"You always need at least one guy on your team -- he's not dirty, but he's nasty," said Wakefield coach Tony Bentley. "And that's Anthony. He's the motivator."

Allen isn't a top scorer like senior teammates Alex Irmer or Geoff Crawley. He doesn't have the above-the-rim athleticism of senior guard Nate Idlet or the AND 1 mix tape siz-

zle of senior point guard Kenny James. But the Warriors wouldn't be playing Landstown in a Group AAA state semifinal on Wednesday afternoon in Richmond without the 6-5 Allen, Wakefield's second-leading rebounder at 7 per game.

"Anthony does all the little things for us," said Irmer. "He's the most vocal guy on our team and gets our emotions up. That's his job. He'll do whatever it takes to help us win."

And no Warrior is more thankful to be playing in the state semifinals than Allen, who spent the better part of his youth in constant trouble. There were fights with classmates and teachers and a stint in Landmark Juvenile Detention Center in Arlington. He would get suspended, return to school and get suspended again.

It was basketball that helped to finally turn his life around.

"I had a real bad attitude and my teachers knew that," said Allen, who didn't play organized basketball until 10th grade. "I was always smart, but when I'd tell people I wanted to go to college they'd laugh at me. I had to prove to everyone that I wasn't a delinquent."

Allen was ineligible to play basketball as a freshman. But his academics began to improve in Arlington County Public Schools' Interlude Program, courses designed for students with emotional disabilities. When Bentley took over as head coach at Wakefield in 2002 he gave Allen a chance.

On the junior varsity.

"Anthony had a rough path. He'd been in trouble. No one really liked him and they thought he was a thug-

Group AAA Basketball Championships

Wednesday, March 9, 6 p.m. at the Richmond Convention Center

Girls semifinals

Wakefield (29-1) vs. Henrico (14-1)
7 p.m.
W. Warriors (29-1) vs. Henrico (14-1)
7 p.m.

Boys semifinals

Landmark (14-1) vs. Wakefield (14-1)
7 p.m.
L.C. Bird (29-1) vs. Woodside (14-1)
7 p.m.

Finals

Saturday at Siegel Center
Girls, 3 p.m.; Boys, 5 p.m.

type," Bentley said. "But he's overcome that. He really respects authority and no matter what challenge you put in front of him he wants to meet it. He was probably good enough to play varsity as a sophomore. But he had to prove himself, on the court and off."

Now sporting a 3.4 grade point average and on track to graduate, Allen has also evolved into a Warriors tri-captain, a position voted on by his teammates before the season. The kid who once drew the ire of teachers is now someone they point to as a success story, especially to other students in the Interlude Program.

"Even when I was always getting in trouble, my parents and grandparents and teachers stayed close to me until I got my life straight," Allen said. "I hope that I can be a role model for kids going through the same things I did."



Chris Rossi/Examiner

Things are looking up for Anthony Allen after he turned his focus towards basketball and away from trouble.



WAKEFIELD HIGH SCHOOL WARRIORS

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